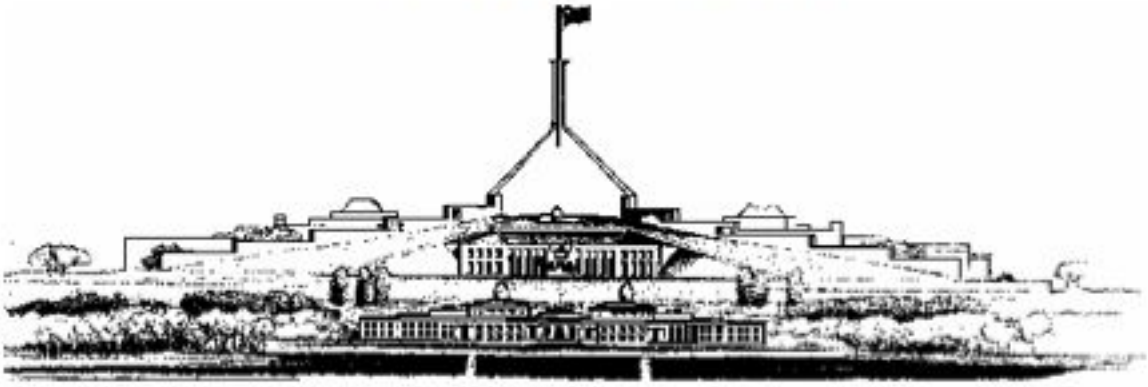
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Special Disability Trusts

SPEECH

Monday, 18 October 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date	Monday, 18 October 2010	**Source**	House
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Questioner		**Responder**	
Speaker	Keenan, Michael, MP	**Question No.**	

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (12.33 pm)—I rise to second and support the motion of my Western Australian colleague the member for Pearce. I acknowledge that she has been a very passionate advocate for people with a disability for a long time and for the whole time that she has been in this parliament. I have been in this parliament for a much shorter time but over that time it has certainly become apparent to me that the provisions the government makes for the most vulnerable members of our community fall short of what the Australian people would expect if they looked into it. We live in an age where the government spends a lot of money on many things. For Australians with a disability there is a fundamental disconnect between their needs and what the government provides for them.

I have been fortunate to be part of a very successful scheme in Western Australia, which is the Adopt-a-Politician Scheme. I understand that it only runs in Western Australia but I would recommend that it run nationally. As part of that scheme politicians who put their hand up to be part of it are paired with a family who cares for a disabled person. In my case I have been adopted by the family of Jodie Quarmby who is cared for by her mother Jenny. Jodie has a very serious brain injury that she acquired as a teenager and has a very serious disability.

I have had discussions with Jenny and it is very easy to understand—and I know this through talking to other families as well—that one of the things that families who are caring for somebody with a disability fear the most is: what is going to happen when they, inevitably, are unable to care for the person that they are caring for? Clearly, if you are a mother or a father caring for a disabled child, the idea of what is going to happen when you are unable to care for them or, of course, even when you inevitably pass away is something that weighs very, very heavily on their minds. Those families would like to create arrangements for the person that they are caring for to have care once they are no longer able to provide it.

That was the whole rationale behind establishing special disability trusts. They were established in 2006 by the Howard government with the hope of ensuring the future wellbeing of people with a disability and also to provide relief and reassurance to carers and their families that, when they were unable to provide that care, it would be provided through another means. The trusts were established to bring benefits, including tax exemptions and concessions, which would make it much easier for parents in particular to plan for their children's future.

Ageing parents of a person with a disability are, as I have said, rightly concerned about what is going to happen when they cannot provide care. Who will make provisions for that care, who will support the person with the disability, who will provide them with accommodation and who will care for them are tough questions that weigh very heavily on the minds of these families.

The aim behind the special disability trusts was to make the life of a person with a disability and their parents a little bit easier by alleviating those pressures. Sadly, they have not been able to fulfil those objectives because the government refuses to take action on the unnecessary bureaucracy that is stopping these special disability trusts from being effective. A parliamentary Senate committee looked into why the take-up rate on those special disability trusts was so low and came up with some sensible proposals for ways that will make it easier for families to access the trusts.

But, sadly, the government has not taken those recommendations seriously and it has not acknowledged the serious challenges that are facing families with someone who has a disability. The defining characteristic of a special disability trust is that it is proactive in nature. It is the family making provision for things that are going to happen in the future when family circumstances change and, of course, as the family ages. The framework of the trust reflects these values and that is how they were designed—to help these families assist over time. They were introduced to achieve what parents and families had been unable to secure under the then arrangements, and that was to create a secure future for the person they were caring for. It is my firm hope that this parliament can do a lot better than previous parliaments have done to provide for the needs of families and Australians with a disability. *(Time expired)*